

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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DCS CHARTS COURSE FOR "PATH TO EXCELLENCE"
Commissioner Names Implementation Team

NASHVILLE - Signifying the importance of moving forward rapidly, Department of Children's Services Commissioner Viola P. Miller appointed a six-member implementation team, which began working 10 days ahead of schedule, to assist in the development of the implementation plan. As stipulated in the most recent negotiations with Children's Rights, Inc., DCS is dedicating six full-time staff members to work closely with the Technical Assistance Committee to develop the implementation plan who and submit it for review and approval to the plaintiffs within a 90-day timeframe. The final version of the implementation plan will then be submitted to the Court for approval. "DCS has not been achieving the desired outcomes as we should and now is the time to embark on a new course," said Commissioner Miller. "Our first opportunity on the 'Path to Excellence' is to map out a strategic plan for implementation; one that includes action steps, assigned responsibilities, and definitive timelines." The basis for the implementation plan was started several weeks ago, after Governor Bredesen appointed a working group to review the Brian A. settlement agreement. This group developed an action plan and aggressive timelines to guarantee DCS meets the terms of the agreement. Veteran children's advocate Bonnie Hommrich will lead Miller's new implementation team. Hommrich is an executive administrative assistant and joined DCS on January 9, 2003, to guide the team in developing and refining the implementation plan. She will play an integral role in executing and monitoring the plan towards full compliance with the settlement agreement. Hommrich has more than 35 years experience in the arena of child welfare, most recently having served as the principal assistant to the secretary for the Cabinet for Families and Children in Kentucky. Hommrich has worked in various aspects of child welfare service on the front line, in supervision, and training foster and adoptive parents. Hommrich is a nationally recognized expert serving on the Executive Committee of the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators and as a trainer for the National College for Juvenile and Family Court Judges. Hommrich assisted in settling a consent decree in Jefferson County, Ky., and was instrumental with the implementation of the Family to Family program, a national model that focuses on keeping children that have been abused and neglected in their own communities by building partnerships within those neighborhoods and communities. Hommrich also has prior experience working with several members of the Technical Assistance Committee. "Dr. Miller's appointment of Bonnie Hommrich to lead the implementation team reflects the importance of this activity. I have worked closely with Ms. Hommrich over several years as she worked to improve the child welfare system in Louisville and the State of Kentucky. She brings to this task experience in reforming public child welfare systems, and a commitment to excellence," said Judith W. Meltzer, deputy director, Center for the Study of Social Policy in Washington, D.C. "As a member of the Technical Assistance Committee, I am optimistic that Tennessee, under Dr. Miller's leadership, will move forward expeditiously to substantially improve results for children and families." Members of the implementation team have been temporarily re-assigned from their daily responsibilities for three months to work solely on the implementation plan.

Path to Excellence Team includes:

Elizabeth Black
DCS Kinship Care Program Coordinator; Family to Family Co-Coordinator

Eric Henderson
Executive Assistant, Program Services

Patty Odom
Team Coordinator, Davidson Co. Foster Care Program

Sophia Jackson
Case Manager II, Montgomery Co. Foster Care Program

Melissa Simmons
Team Coordinator, East Region/Canton, TN

"This team brings expertise in child welfare and a level of experience from the field that will prove invaluable in the planning process," said Miller. "I am committed to raising the bar and making DCS a high quality, high performance agency that focuses on positive outcomes for children and families. By accomplishing this goal, we will be in compliance with the Brian A. Settlement Agreement."

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